SYLLABUS

Course Description

Introduction to the New Testament, its origin, its content and methods of interpretation.

This is an Explorations course in the Humanities and Fine Arts. Completing this course will help you to do the following in greater depth: 1) analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments; 2) describe various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures; 3) identify issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance; 4) demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe the content, major themes (e.g., Covenant) and literary forms of the NT (1,2)
- Analyze how Jesus came to be viewed as the Messiah (2)
- Elucidate how belief in Christ challenged the cult of the Roman Emperor? (3)
- Summarize the main events in the public career of Jesus (4)
- Explain Mark’s portrayal of Jesus and the message of his gospel (5)
- Evaluate the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount for Christians today (6)
- Relate Luke’s views about poverty and riches to contemporary life (7)
- Explain how John presents Jesus as divine Wisdom in his gospel (8)
- Evaluate the quest to find the historical Jesus (9)
- Evaluate the contemporary relevance of the decision-making model used to resolve the Jewish - Gentile conflict (10)
- Explain Paul’s view of the resurrection of Christians (11)
- Analyze Paul’s views on slavery and women and their relevance for today (12)
- Appreciate the tension in Paul between living in the Spirit vs. the law (13)
- Articulate the purpose of apocalyptic literature and identify its hallmarks (14)
Description

In this course we examine the structure, composition and meaning of the New Testament, the earliest collection of Christian writings gathered into a single volume. By reading texts from a number of NT books we will see that a variety of stories make up the all-encompassing story. To understand the diversity of the twenty-seven books in the NT, we will focus on the gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and the letters of Paul. We will discuss a variety of methods for interpreting biblical texts, and we will learn to read the NT critically and in its historical context. We will learn that the New Testament is a much richer and more complex book, or rather collection of books, than we might initially suppose. Note: there may be some changes or fine tuning to the syllabus.

Approach

Our approach is to work with both primary texts (New Testament, NRSV translation) as well as secondary sources. In the classroom there will be lectures, discussion, writing exercises, dialogue, the use of audio-visual materials, and student presentations. Within this framework, as a student you will be invited to identify your own learning goals for this course, to pursue your own questions as they relate to the study of the New Testament, to engage the Biblical text itself, and to contribute your perspectives.

Required Texts


The NRSV will be used in class. You may use other editions of the NRSV or translations, although the NRSV is the preferred version for this class.

Open Electronic Resources (OER) for research project, independent study

Oxford Biblical Studies Online @ [www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com](http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com)

SDSU Database, trial period until 09/17/16

The Virtual World Project @ [www.virtualworldproject.org](http://www.virtualworldproject.org)

Interactive virtual tours of archaeological sites in Israel and Jordan. See sites from the early Roman Period (63 BCE – 133 CE), e.g., Herodium, Masada, and Qumran.

Bible Odyssey @ [http://www.bibleodyssey.org/](http://www.bibleodyssey.org/)

Biblical topics: People, Places, and Passages. Includes short essays and videos by scholars. Note that in the Tools tab, one can submit questions to biblical experts and check out a glossary of key terms.
Course Outline and Assignments

1. Aug 29  
   **What is the New Testament? Scholarly ways to study the NT.**
   
   Read: Gen 9:8-17; 12:1-3; Exodus 19:3-6; 20:1-17; 2 Sam 7:12-17; Jeremiah 31:31; 1 Cor 11:25; Matt 26:27-28 (covenant)  
   Harris, ch 1: Overview of the NT (esp. 11-16)  
   Media: Exploration of Oxford Biblical Research Online  

   **Outcome:** Identify and describe the content, themes (e.g., Covenant) and main literary forms in the New Testament  

2. Sept 12  
   **Where did the NT come from? Why these 27 books?**  
   **What was the Jewish religion like in the time of Jesus?**  
   **Are there parallels between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT?**  
   **What kind of Messiah is Jesus according to the NT?**
   
   Read: Samuel 7:12-17; Psalm 89:19-37; Isaiah 9:6-7; 52:13-53:12  
   Harris, ch 2-3: NT Canon, Jewish World (esp. 23-30, 49-69)  
   Media: Dead Sea Scrolls  

   **Outcome:** Analyze how Jesus came to be viewed as the Messiah  

3. Sept 19  
   **What philosophies and religions in the Greco-Roman world did Christianity have to compete with?**
   
   Read: Lk 2:22-38; Mark 11:27; Acts 2:46 (Herod's Temple)  
   Harris, chapters 4-5 (esp. 71-73, 78, 80-83, 89-108)  
   Media: Herod's Temple  

   *** Last date to select topic for class research presentation.  

   **Outcome:** Elucidate how belief in Christ challenged the cult of the Roman Emperor?  

4. Sept 26  
   **What are the Gospels and how were they created?**  
   **What's the Synoptic Problem? How to solve it?**  
   **How does Mark portray Jesus, his family, and his disciples?**  
   **What is a parable and how does Jesus use this literary form?**
   
   Read: The Gospel of Mark, chapters 1-8
Outcomes:

5. Oct 3

Why was Jesus so misunderstood by his family and disciples?
What is Mark’s main message and how does he get this across?
Does the resurrection of Jesus imply an empty tomb?

Read: The Gospel of Mark, chapters 9-16
Harris, chapter 7 (153-164).

Media: The Passion of the Christ

Outcome: Explain Mark’s portrayal of Jesus and the message of his gospel

First Test – Bring scantron No. F-288-PAR-L

6. Oct 10

What is Matthew’s kingdom ethic? Would it make society better?
Does “turn the other cheek” apply to nations or to individuals only?

Read: Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5-7
Harris, chapter 8 (esp. 165-182)

Media: From Jesus to Christ

Outcome: Evaluate the relevance of the Sermon on the Mount for Christians today

7. Oct 17

What does Luke have to say about poverty and riches?
How does the “reversal of fortunes” work in Luke’s Gospel?
What roles do women play in Luke’s Gospel?

Read: Gospel of Luke, chapters 9-19, 24
Harris, chapter 9 (esp. 197-210, 213-220, 224-225)

Media: From Jesus to Christ

Outcome: Relate Luke’s views about poverty and riches to contemporary life
8. Oct 24

What makes John’s Gospel so different from the others?
What influence did John’s Gospel have on subsequent Christian thought about Jesus’ divinity?

Read: Gospel of John, chapter 1:1-18
Harris, chapter 10 (esp. 228-246)

Media: The Face of Jesus in Art (DVD)

Outcome: Explain how Jesus is presented as divine Wisdom in John.

9. Oct 31

How can we reconstruct a coherent picture of Jesus and his teachings using the source materials currently available?

Harris: chapter 12 (261-279)

Second Test – bring scantron No. F-289-PAR-L

Outcome: Evaluate the quest to find the historical Jesus

10. Nov 7

How does the Jerusalem community put into practice the social and economic principles enunciated in Luke’s Gospel?
How did the church resolve the issue of membership at the meeting of Church leaders in Jerusalem?

Read: Acts, chapters 1-5, 9, 11-15, 28
Harris, chapter 12 (esp. 281-292; 295-300)
Media: Peter and Paul and the Christian Revolution (DVD)

Outcome: Evaluate the contemporary relevance of the decision-making model used to resolve the Jewish - Gentile conflict

11. Nov 14

How did Paul’s experience of the risen Jesus change his life and shape his teaching, especially about God?
What does Paul teach about life after death and the resurrection of Christians?

Read: Bible: 1 Thessalonians; 1 Corinthians 8:1-6; chapters 12-15
Harris, chapters 13,14 (esp. 313-320; 325-333; 336-338; 346-349)

Media: Paul’s Journey’s (VHS)

Outcome: Explain Paul’s view of the resurrection of Christians
12. Nov 21 Independent Study (no class)

13. Nov 28 With Paul’s emphasis on spirit and freedom, are rules relevant?
   Read: Galatians 1:1 - 4:11; Romans 1-5; Harris, chapters 15 (esp. 355-368)
   Media: Paul’s Journey’s
   **Essay**: In-class essay on topic chosen for your class research presentation (to be done without notes or other material).
   **Outcome**: Appreciate the tension in Paul between living in the Spirit and following the law.

14. Dec 5 Did Paul require Christians to free their slaves?
   How did Paul function in a world class city like Ephesus?
   How would Paul and James debate faith vs. good works?
   Read: Philemon; James 2; Jude
   Harris, chapters 16, 17, 18 (esp. 379-385; 411-414; 417-418)
   Media: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwKeq9nWsfl (slavery)
   **Outcome**: Analyze Paul’s views on slavery and women and their relevance for today

15. Dec 12 What’s the “mark of the beast”? Is “666” an unlucky number?
   How is the battle between good and evil played out in contemporary culture (films, literature)?
   Harris, chapter 19-20 (esp. 436-448; 458-464)
   *** Review for final exam
   **Outcome**: Articulate the purpose of apocalyptic literature and identify its hallmarks

16. Dec 19 Final exam: multiple choice, true/false, essay questions
   Bring scantron  No. F-289-PAR-L
Course Requirements

This course emphasizes learning via attendance and active participation, note-taking during class lectures, and intensive self-study of assigned readings.

1. Class attendance, participation, completion of work sheets, and brief essays. Your consistent presence and active participation are important for you to meet the course objectives as well as the goals that you have set for yourself. Please arrive on time and remain until the end of class unless you have made prior arrangements with the instructor.

Class participation includes:
   a. Participation in discussion (includes small groups).
   b. Completion of regularly assigned work sheets related to themes in the Bible
   c. Writing brief, ten minute essays either at the beginning or the end of class based upon the reading, lecture, discussion, and/or student presentations. These will be open book, yet it will be difficult to do well on these without engaging the assigned reading material beforehand.
   d. Note: Electronic devices of all types (e.g., laptops, cell phones) are to be turned off during class, since they can easily be a distraction and hinder the learning process. An exception is when a student is giving a class presentation. Violations will result in the loss of two (2) points per instance on the FINAL class average.
   e. Three or more absences from all or part of the class sessions may prevent you from passing the course.

2. Assigned reading. This is to be done before the class for which the reading is assigned. I recommend that you review the Key Topics/Themes, Summary, and Questions for Review/Discussion/Reflection in each chapter of Harris to help guide your thinking before reading it. Students may be assigned to read or review topics from Online Electronic Resources (listed above).

3. Individual research class presentation. If you are strongly disinclined to give a research class presentation, please consult with professor about other options.

For the class research presentation (about 15 minutes), the use of visuals is strongly encouraged, e.g., power point, images, brief video clips, etc. The dates and topics for research class presentations will be arranged during class (extra points for excellent presentations!).

*Powerpoints (minimum of 15 slides) and other material for class research presentations are to be sent to the professor by 6:00 pm on the Thursday prior to the scheduled date for the presentation. If the presentation is not well done, it may not be presented to the class and points will not earned. On the day of your presentation, arrive early to set up your work.*
Bring your presentation on a thumb drive and email it to yourself.

4. In-class essay on November 28 on the topic chosen for your individual research class presentation. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate in a well-written composition, the insights you have gained from your research. In the essay refer to authors/sources you have consulted (in addition to Harris).

5. Tests (2) and Final Exam. The questions are both objective and essay. Stress is placed both on mastering general concepts and on learning factual information. The textbook and notes may not be used on tests or exam. The tests and final exam are comprehensive but not cumulative.

6. Grading practice and criteria. Grades for the course will be letter grades, unless a student requests grading by Cr/NC. Note that an "A" indicates exceptional work; a "B" above average work, "praiseworthy performance"; and a "C" average work, "the most common undergraduate grade." The final grade will include plus/minus (e.g. A+, A, A-).

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No makeup essays, tests or exams will be given. Please notify me when matters such as personal or family emergencies come up.

Syllabus. Please see Blackboard postings for any adjustments or updates to the syllabus.

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Welcome to the course! I hope that this will be a rich and enjoyable learning experience for all of us as we engage the material and one another. Please feel free to contact me to share your own reflections or to discuss any questions or problems which may arise. I will be available before and after class to meet with you. Otherwise, you may call me at the numbers given above or contact me through e-mail. Again, welcome!